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NSC BRIEFING

24 February 1956

VIETNAMESE ELECTION

- I. Election of a South Vietnam National Assembly next Sunday (4 March) will complete long-drawn-out preparations to construct a popular base under Premier Diem's regime.
- A. 123-man body will be elected: its first task--approval of a Diem-drafted constitution.
- B. Draft (still unpublished) reportedly grants overriding authority to executive--including power to dissolve Assembly in cases of "serious conflict with the government."
- II. Delay in holding elections has been used by Diem regime both to organize new political parties, committed to support of regime, and to hamstring opposition groups.
- A. Opposition groups, protesting restrictive election regulations, have refused to enter their own lists of candidates.
1. Some individual opposition members have filed as independents, however.
- B. Apparently as a warning, Diem recently arrested, later released Pham Huy Dan, one of most vocal of opposition leaders.
- III. Meanwhile, South Vietnam government has reduced internal rebellion to lowest level yet achieved.
- A. Recent negotiated surrender of one of two Hoa Hao rebel commanders, with over 1,000 troops, is important psychological victory for Diem.

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B. Simultaneously, Vietnamese army has moved into Cao Dai territory, thus virtually eliminating armed threat from that quarter.

IV. Viet Minh reaction to Assembly elections plans in South has been getting noisier.

A. Hanoi radio claims "Vietnamese people" will "transform elections into a bloody reply to the Americans and their lackeys."

B. Viet Minh also calling for "massive boycott" of elections but at same time conceding that Diem will undoubtedly win at polls, as he did in the "Bao Dai referendum farce."

V. Probable that Viet Minh will use every means short of overt, traceable interferences to disrupt polling.

A. Full capabilities for terrorism and sabotage unlikely to be employed, since appearance of scrupulous compliance with Geneva terms is important to Viet Minh from world propaganda standpoint.

B. Communist line is that South, by its "unilateral elections" and refusal to consult on nationwide elections is causing a breakdown of Geneva accord.

C. Thus, Communists claim new international conference is required.